

Threat

by Saber Wing

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Summary: Hiccup has never really thought of himself as the heir to the Berk Chiefdom. Imagine his surprise when he finds people are willing to kill him for it.

1. Chapter 1

Hiccup had never really thought of himself as the heir to the Berk Chiefdom.

Oh sure, he was the offspring of Stoick the Vast, who just happened to be the current chief. Traditionally, that did mean he would have been first in line. Contrary to popular belief, however, their line of succession wasn't strictly based on blood. If someone more worthy vied for the position they would be given their fair chance, and in the end the decision would be based upon both the valor of the challenger and how the people felt.

Naturally since Hiccup was, wellâ€¦Hiccup, he had accepted a long time ago that no one was ever going to follow a puny little fish-bone who couldn't even lift an ax, let alone defend a village. He'd been the laughingstock for so long, the last person to suggest Hiccup take up his father's mantle was a comedy performer at their last Snoggletag celebration. Silent Sven re-cracked his injured ribs he'd laughed so hard.

Needless to say, most Hooligans had long since stopped even mentioning his name in the same sentence as the word 'chief.' So, when his father approached him one summer afternoon to tell him he would be accompanying Stoick to a meeting of the Great Chiefs, Hiccup thought his reasoning perfectly sound when he laughed in his father's face.

"Yeah, good one dad," Hiccup gasped between breaths, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. To the other chiefs, his name might as well have been 'Stoick's Little Embarrassment.' What could his father ever hope

to gain from claiming somebody like him, son or not? Sure it was true he'd successfully integrated dragons into Berkian society, but it wasn't as if one good thing was going to erase so many years of being the village runt. He was still puny and pathetic in stature, and that was all they cared about. Right?

Right. Now Stoick would laugh, slap him on the shoulder and walk away, while Hiccup pretended it totally wasn't throbbing in the aftermath.

Oddly enough though, when Hiccup gazed into his father's face, he most assuredly wasn't amused. On the contrary, he looked troubled.

"This isn't a joke, Hiccup. You're to accompany me as my heir."

He chuckled. Man, who knew his dad could be such a kidder?

Stoick narrowed his eyes.

"You're not kidding, are you?"

His father clucked his tongue in disbelief, cape billowing behind him as he strode a few paces to stand beside Hiccup, who was in the middle of sharpening a sword.

"Of course not! Berk has never been in a better position and we have you to thank! People are taking notice, and do you know what that tells me? It tells me they'd follow you."

Hiccup's only response was a skeptical raised eyebrow.

Stoick sighed, rubbing his face with his hands.

"Son, I know what I've said in the past. I'm not proud of it. But if you'll give me the chance, I can start makin' it up to you now. There's not a better man to lead when I'm dead and gone. I'd like you to consider it."

Despite his misgivings, Hiccup couldn't stop the grin from spreading across his face, or his heart from bursting with joy. That sentence was everything he'd ever wanted from his father wrapped up in just a few words.

How many days had he curled up in bed at night, hoping to wake as someone else? Clutched his sketchbook tight wishing it were a weapon? How many times had he told himself he was a Viking as he hid behind his sarcasm and pushed back the tears?

His father was proud of him. He was proud of him and now he wanted him to take his place when he was gone. It was too good to be true.

I'm dreaming this. I must be.

A small bitter part of him, however, turned his joy to ashes. He couldn't help the scathing remark that slipped unbidden from his lips.

"Gee, and all I had to do was lose a leg and save the entire island

from a legion of enslaved dragons. Thanks, dad. You know what they say. A little bit of death goes a long way. What do I get if I lose an arm? Because you know, there's still time to cash in on that."

Before the words were even out of his mouth, he wished he could take them back. His dad wasn't exactly the paragon of fatherly wisdom, but Hiccup never thought himself the type to use his mistakes to hurt him. It was petty and stupid, and he was above that.

Or he thought he was, at least.

Unfortunately, his words hit their mark regardless. Stoick's face darkened with regret.

Though he wasn't a man who shied away from fights of any sort, there were a few distinct moments throughout Hiccup's life when his father had refused to look at him. He could count them on the fingers of one hand, but they existed all the same. This was another of those moments. For a split second, Stoick the Vast squeezed his eyes shut, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers.

Suddenly, he didn't seem quite so vast anymore. It was highly unsettling.

Hiccup was one of the few people alive who could so flippantly disrespect the chief and walk away from a humbled man, rather than an angry one hunting for his head. Nevertheless, he almost wished for anger. It would have been better than this. This quiet sadness.

Oh, Gods. Please yell at me. Say something. Anything.

Before he could stammer an apology, the Stoick he knew was already back, all fire and brusqueness. The Viking Chief met his eyes and though Hiccup could see the apology in them, they also left no room for argument. "No, don't take it back. You've a right to be angry. And I'm not goin' to force you into anything you don't want. Just think about it."

Without another word, he spun on his heel and stomped his way over to the exit, pausing in the doorway to gaze back at a reeling Hiccup over his shoulder.

"I'm proud of you, son. Whatever you decide."

When he heard the front door of the forge slam shut, Hiccup groaned, setting the sword aside and banging his head repeatedly into his work table. Of all the cards he could have played, did it have to be the all-important, _I'm proud of you_, _son_?

Toothless warbled and nudged him in the side, green eyes huge as he studied his rider.

Hiccup smiled, though his heart wasn't in it, caressing his cheek. "I'm all right, bud. I just never thought I'd hear him say that once, let alone twice in my lifetime. And he wants me to be chief too? What do I do with that?"

His best friend cocked his head and favored him with a goofy,

toothless grin, one that had earned him his name. He could practically hear the enthusiasm in his silence. Well. Silent save for the excited swishing of his tail.

"Yeah, I'm excited too. Butâ€¦making me Chief of Berk? I've been getting more respect around here, but would the tribe go that far? Would I even be any good at it?"

If it was possible for a dragon to nod emphatically, that was what Toothless did. He surged to his feet and leaped enthusiastic circles around Hiccup, knocking several shields and old maces off the walls in his haste. The boy laughed as he licked his face and settled on his haunches, gazing at him with adoring eyes. "Well I have your vote of confidence. That's something, huh?"

The Night Fury blew a frustrated huff out of his nostrils, disgruntled.

Hiccup scowled, though it was more playful than serious. He wished he could be as confident as his dragon. "Hey, it's a lot to take in. I'll think about it, okay? In the meantime what do you say we find you some dinner? Gobber won't mind if we close shop early for one day."

Toothless was bounding out the door before he'd even gotten the entire sentence out. Well, that was a yes then.

As he locked up the forge and followed contentedly after his dragon, the young rider had to admit; it really was incredible to see how far he'd come in just a few short months. He wasn't the village screw-up, not anymore. It was a little early to say but maybe, just maybe, Hiccup the Useless wasn't so useless after all.

Frightening as it sounded, he was almost starting to believe that himself. He might never be a Viking in the traditional sense of the word, but he could be just as strong. Just as brave and fearless. After what happened with Toothless and the Red Death, he would never doubt that again.

But could he be Chief? Could he actually take on such a daunting task?

Honestly, he didn't know, but it was an opportunity he shouldn't let go to waste.

* * *

><p>Initially this was going to be a oneshot, but then I started writing and the story obviously had other plans, because it's at least going to span a few chapters now, if not longer depending on where it goes. This is pretty much just an introduction. Short, I know, and I have part of the next installment written already. I just felt like the story flowed better if I split this part and everything else though.<p>

I just got a second job, so my time will be more limited, but I'll attempt to update in a somewhat timely fashion. Thanks so much for reading!

2. Chapter 2

The feast later that week was when things really started to get weird.

Well. Weirder, anyway.

Stoick had gathered the entire village in the Great Hall this evening. That in itself was standard enough. It was often his father's custom to make a big deal out of every Chiefs meeting, and have a lavish feast to celebrate his tribe and their prosperity, even if there wasn't any to be had. Vikings were stubborn that way. Or at least the Hooligans were, though Hiccup suspected he spoke for every tribe when he described them as bull-headed loons.

This time an invitation was extended to Toothless, Stormfly, and the others, who surprisingly weren't the strange part. Although a year ago, if someone told him he'd be spending the feast trying to keep a dragon off the table, he would have laughed them all the way to the next Chieftom.

No. What really set him on edge was the way people were looking at him. Or rather, that they were looking at him. Sure, people had begun to remember Hiccup was alive after he'd saved their skins, but tonight it seemed different somehow. Tribesmen who'd never even glanced his way before were stopping to wave or offer greetings.

What is this? Am I dying? Being sold into slavery? Losing another limb?

They couldn't have heard about the whole 'heir' thing already. He and his dad just talked about it two days ago.

Hiccup paused.

Then thought about what he'd just said and groaned with dismay.

Okay. So everybody knew by now. Great. He should have felt flattered that people were being so—well, nice to him, but honestly it was kind of freaking him out. Not to mention, he wasn't nearly stupid enough to think it was all genuine.

"You know for Vikings, they're getting pretty good at sucking up to me."

Astrid punched him in the shoulder while Hiccup grimaced, tossing a half-hearted glare in her direction. "Oh come on, Hiccup. You're finally getting a little respect around here. That's worth something."

"Yeah I guess, but I want them to respect me for me, not because my dad thinks I'm awesome now, or whatever," he muttered in response, aware that he sounded about as petulant as a five-year old begging for their first ax.

Try as he might, Hiccup couldn't quite shake this childish defiance. He hadn't yet given Stoick an answer, but he almost wanted to tell him no just to spite him. That was stupid and he knew it, but there

was so much bitterness bottled up inside of him, and he really wasn't sure what he should do with it. He thought he was okay with everything that happened in his childhood, but clearly that wasn't the case. He needed to come to terms with it before he screwed everything up for himself.

Or before he genuinely hurt his father, which was the last thing he wanted. Despite the mistakes Stoick had made, Hiccup loved him dearly. He didn't want to see him suffer.

Caught up in these musings, the last thing he expected to find was his lovely female companion brushing the bangs out of his eyes. Her fingers were rough with calluses, but inviting and warm. He found himself struggling not to lean into her touch. "You're doing it again."

"Uh, doing what exactly?" He had to admit, he felt pretty pleased with himself when he managed not to stammer his response.

"Beating yourself up. I'm the only one who's allowed to give you a hard time so stop that, okay?"

"Easier said than done. Getting beat up is kind of what I do. In hundreds of different contexts, yes, but it happens. A lot."

She laughed, blue eyes sparkling with mirth, although if he looked closer, he could swear there was something else there. If he hadn't known better, he might have said she looked protective.

That was just weird, right? Hiccup swore he was never going to get used to this whole Astrid caring about his existence thing.

"Yeah. We'll see about that." Her eyes glinted with the promise of fire and blood, which was at the same time both scary, and awkwardly attractive.

His heart did weird things when she talked like that, things he also wasn't sure what to do with. Still, it was gratifying to find himself on Astrid's, "People I'd Kill For" list. Hiccup couldn't help but smile. He wasn't sure what he and the blonde Viking were exactly, but he did know he never wanted to lose it.

Dinner came and went without incident. His dad of course, gave a speech that was both really long and really boring. Blah blah Vikings, blah blah glory. He was just grateful his name remained blessedly absent from it. Apparently Stoick respected Hiccup's wishes, and was giving him the space he needed to think.

Yeah, way to make him feel worse about how sullen he was being over the whole thing.

The bards were emerging now, laughing merrily and dragging out the kegs of mead for their older brethren. Normally the songs and stories were Hiccup's favorite part, but tonight he just wasn't in the mood. Suddenly, he found himself glad Snotlout and the others had more interesting things than annoying him on their agenda tonight.

He was even gladder that Astrid was sticking close. She leaned toward him now, shoulder brushing against his. Normally she wasn't the touchiest person, but she must have realized it was what he needed.

He couldn't put into words how grateful he was for that. "If you wanna skip out on all of this, I'll cover for you with your dad. I'll just tell him one of the dragons got fussy."

Hiccup felt himself nodding his head. He was exhausted and he didn't feel like keeping up this façade anymore. He needed to go somewhere. Think. Get his head on straight. He wasn't going manage that while smothered in the Great Hall.

"Yeah, that would be great, actually. I justâ€¦|don't want to be here right now."

Astrid's eyes softened and for a moment she almost looked like she wanted to reach out again, but she refrained, sensing his withdrawal. Just as she'd known when to touch him before, she knew now that Hiccup wanted to be left alone with his thoughts and she accepted that.

Had he mentioned how much he really, _really _liked Astrid?

He started to walk away from her, but turned back on a whim.

"Thank you." Before he could change his mind, he leaned in and kissed her cheek, darting away before he tripped or did something else to make himself look like an idiot. Before he stumbled away however, he did remind himself to remember the blank, vaguely awed look on her face and file it away for safe keeping.

Toothless, evidently, had sensed the waning mood of his rider even from a distance away, where he'd been messing around with the other dragons. He met Hiccup at the door, rubbing against his side with a distressed whine.

Hiccup wrapped his arm around his neck. "It's okay, bud. You can stay and have fun. Just because I'm not enjoying this doesn't mean you shouldn't."

The Night Fury circled around him and nudged his back, pushing him forward and planting himself at Hiccup's side with a stubborn snort.

"Toothless, really. I'm just gonna go work on some designs for a while, clear my head. You know I'm no fun when I'm like this. I don't wanna rub my bad mood off on you."

His best friend's only answer was an angry snarl and another push toward the door.

"All right, all right. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Despite his words, Hiccup felt the warmth wrap itself around him like a cloak in a frigid winter storm. Now that the Night Fury was part of his life, he couldn't remember what he ever did without him. At first he hadn't wanted company, not even Astrid's, but Toothless wasn't just anyone. He was part of him. Hiccup could vent to him for hours and there was neither judgment, nor expectation. He could simply talk, without having to worry about being polite or carrying on a conversation.

_Besides, I guess it's kind of nice not being alone. I could get used

to that._

* * *

><p>Somewhere along the way, Hiccup forgot all about any plans he'd had for returning to the forge. The night was remarkably clear, and the stars twinkled so brightly in the night sky, he swore he could reach out to touch them. Maybe he and Toothless should go for a flight later.<p>

Currently, his giant child of a dragon was frolicking in the waves below. Hiccup sat on the edge of a cliff just outside the village, right where the last vestiges of their civilization dropped off and began to shrink in the distance. Though there were a few houses close by, they were far enough away that he couldn't hear voices, and there wasn't much danger of being disturbed.

The air was crisp, though remarkable absent wind, and it was comfortably warm rather than stifling. In a land where it snowed nine months of the year, most people cherished days like this, and he was no exception.

The quiet had done its job and helped him clear his head. Not that he particularly liked what he'd found, but nobody said reality was always fun.

He had to talk to his dad. That much was clear.

Up until now, he'd been content shoving all of his negative feelings into a box at the back of his mind, never to see the light of day again. Now that those emotions were bursting free and bleeding back into his consciousness, they were eating him alive. All of those days he'd told himself he was okay had been pure bravado on his part. He hadn't been okay. Not at all, and clearly, he still wasn't.

Being reminded of how useless he was every day of his existence had really done a number on him. Hiccup understood that now. He didn't like it, but he understood it. And he was ready to move past it, really, but clearly that wasn't going to happen until he gave voice to every negative feeling he'd ever felt, and that did unfortunately include a lot of resentment toward his father and fellow dragon riders.

Tonight he'd leave it alone, but tomorrow, he and Stoick were going to sit down and have a very long, very difficult discussion. One Hiccup was dreading already, but in the end their relationship would be stronger for it. He was ready to form a bond with his dad. One that wasn't constantly strained and uncomfortable.

His stomach tied up in knots just thinking about how horribly this whole talk thing could go, but he also felt at peace. One way or another, things were going to be resolved, and his father would finally understand just how much he and the other villagers had wronged him. A small, ugly part of him felt a twinge of satisfaction at that.

He hated that side of himself. Hated that it existed, but he supposed all people had moments like this. Humans could turn into monsters just as easily as dragons. There was a man-eating animal in everyone, if they tried hard enough to find it. Cheery thought.

Later, he would laugh at the irony that fate would decide this was the perfect moment to send an arrow careening into the back of his left shoulder.

For a moment, he was too shocked to do or feel anything. The blow knocked him forward into the grass and he gasped, wide-eyed. It was a miracle the kick back hadn't sent him over the edge of the cliff. As it was, his head hung over, though he could focus on nothing in the moment's confusion. Distantly, he heard Toothless frantically clawing up the cliff-side to get to him, roaring in what Hiccup assumed was equal parts confusion, fear

and rage. Terrible rage.

Hiccup struggled to lift himself with his good arm, craning his neck to confirm that yes, there really was an arrow shaft protruding from his shoulder. That was when the pain hit him, and everything else went to Hel in a hand basket. He collapsed under his own weight, breathless.

In that moment, Toothless cleared the edge of the cliff and flung himself in front of his rider, just in time to shatter the second arrow midair with a feral snap of his teeth. Furious, the Night Fury loosed a savage cry and fired in the direction the shot had come from, though he refused to budge from where he stood huddled over Hiccup, protecting him from further harm.

He opened his mouth to speak, to tell Toothless it was okay and that he should calm down, but instead of words, all his lips could produce was a strangled moan.

He'd recovered from second degree burns and even lost a limb, but he still wasn't ready for the way his shoulder throbbed, white-hot with agony around the arrow shaft. Hiccup bit his lip, tried to move his arm, and was rewarded with the tooth-gnashing sensation of stone grinding against bone.

That was when he screamed. He couldn't help it. It almost felt stupid to be moved by a mere arrow considering all he'd been through, but oh _Odin_ it hurt. He could barely think straight through the pain, but he had to try. Fast.

His vision was darkening around the edges. That wasn't good. For a dizzying moment he thought he was going to pass out, but he shut his eyes, took a few deep breaths, then opened them again, willing himself to keep it together long enough to prepare a solid game plan.

Toothless seemed unsure whether he wanted to go after the shooter or stay with Hiccup, and he kept firing frustrated shots at the sky, enraged. In the end, he settled for circling around Hiccup possessively, growling, shielding him with his tail and nosing at him worriedly.

_Who shoots at a guy with a Night Fury anyway? _Hiccup thought to himself. He started to giggle about that, then decided it hurt too much and rested his head against Toothless' foreleg instead, nauseous. He couldn't move, he couldn't think, and now he had a possessive, overly protective Night Fury circling around him, so even

if someone had heard all the fuss he was making, and they had to have, he doubted the dragon was going to let anyone near him.

He should probably do something about that.

Should, but his shoulder hurt so bad, and he was _so _tiredâ€|

Steadily, his eyes were drifting shut. Just a second. One second wouldn't hurt. Then he'd figure out what to do from there.

Sleep. Sleep fixed everything.

The last thing he heard was the shrill cry of a Night Fury, echoing in the night sky.

3. Chapter 3

Stoick the Vast did not believe in coincidence. To do so would go against everything he knew.

Therefore, when a messenger burst through the doors of the Great Hall, pale, panting, and clothed in the garb of a different chieftain, he knew it had something to do with the upcoming conference. What could be so urgent, he wondered, that would make this stranger move with such haste in the middle of the night? He had received no word of any ships docking in the harbor, but then, single man vessels could be hard to spot at night.

From the look of him, he had traveled some way. The crest of the Bashem Oiks stood out, carved into his helm and on his gauntlets. Their Chief had been an ally of the Hairy Hooligans for some time. This year, they were to host the meet.

Upon his entering, the festivities grinded to a halt, villagers and performers alike stopping to stare as the doors burst open and this stranger rushed in, as if the devil were chasing him.

Stoick stood from his place at the head of the table, face breaking out into a scowl. Whatever it was, it could damn well wait until after the feast.

"Storming into my celebration unannounced? This better be urgent, stranger. Speak your business and have done with it."

The man came to a stop in front of Stoick. Sweat soaked his furs, and though he looked likely to collapse, he did not falter. He merely stood up straighter and met Stoick's eye, gaze full of purpose. Well, he had balls if nothing else. He liked that.

"I've been sent to tell you that the meet is being postponed."

Stoick's eyes widened. "What are you talking about?"

"Someone has made an attempt on the lives of our Chief and his heir. A few weeks hence we received messages from two other tribes claiming the same. Somebody's tryin' to take us all out."

The Viking Chief felt his stomach drop to his feet, glancing around the Great Hall with a sinking feeling.

He didn't see Hiccup or Toothless anywhere.

His son had kept his distance ever since Stoick had approached him the other day, and he'd let him, but now he was regretting not keeping a closer eye on the boy. If what this stranger said was true, he shouldn't be left alone.

Nevertheless, he had no proof. How was Stoick to know if this was even from the Oiks' Chief at all?

No. He needed more than just the word of a stranger. He drew himself to his full height, glaring down at the messenger. "Do you think I'm an idiot, man? What proof do you have of this?"

Stoick had been so caught up in his musings, he hadn't noticed the man digging through his satchel until he pulled a scroll of parchment from it, stepping forward to hand it to Stoick. The Oik Chief's official seal faced outward, and he broke the wax to unfurl the parchment.

His heart sank farther into his chest with every word. The messenger's story—it was all true. Stoick had known the Chief for practically his entire life. He would know his hand anywhere, and this letter was no forgery.

Hiccup. Oh Gods above, the boy was always wandering off by himself. He was the perfect target. Toothless was usually with him, which gave Stoick some measure of relief, but dragon though he might be, they could still be killed. Every member of his tribe was living proof of this.

He scanned the room with a grim eye, struggling not to betray his rising apprehension. He was being silly. Toothless was a Night Fury. If there was anywhere Hiccup would be safe, it would be by his side.

Nevertheless, he was not just the boy's chief. He was his father. Fathers worried over their offspring, and Stoick was swallowing panic despite himself.

As his eyes rapidly scanned the Great Hall, they fell upon Astrid Hofferson. Now, he couldn't say he knew her well, but he did know fear when he saw it, and it was all over her face. That was unusual for any Viking, least of all her. He had only ever known her to be every inch as fierce as the reputation she'd earned for herself.

"Where is Hiccup? Where is my son?"

Before he could say another word, the piercing cry of a Night Fury shook the foundation of the Great Hall, casks of mead, goblets, and dishes of food toppling over as the earth shook beneath their feet.

Stoick didn't think. He was running before the trembling ceased.

* * *

><p>Toothless was angry.<p>

He could smell the blood, could feel it staining his snout where he had nudged his rider, and it infuriated him.

He was angry.

Oh, he was so _very angry._

He roared, and though he could smell the scorched flesh of the offender who had _dared _to harm Hiccup, it did nothing to satisfy him. He wanted to rip him apart with his teeth and drain him of all the blood in his body for daring to spill any. How dare he?

How dare _he _touch what belonged to Toothless? How dare he harm that which made him whole?

His body trembled with pent-up rage, and he circled around Hiccup in distressed agitation. The boy was not moving now. Was not speaking, was not moving, was not caressing him or hugging his neck, and Toothless did not like that. He did not like when Hiccup was still.

He recalled another time when he could smell blood in the air. A time when his human's pale white leg had turned to ash and mangled bone.

He roared, rejecting it with all of his being as he fired a shot into the air, wishing it were the one who dared attack his rider.

No.

He would not accept this. He would not ever, ever let anyone hurt Hiccup again.

He would keep everything away from him.

He would kill the whole world to keep him safe.

Toothless could do it. He could do anything for Hiccup.

Anything for him.

He settled on his haunches and pulled the human closer, snarling as he heard others approach. It did not matter to him that he knew all of their scents, could identify them without having to see their faces.

They were people.

They were alive.

That meant they could harm Hiccup, and they would not pass.

They would not.

They would die first.

"Hiccup!" a voice shouted. Toothless recognized it as belonging to

his human's sire. He was close enough to see them now. Close enough to recognize Toothless, clutching the boy to his chest, and he knew that this was Hiccup's sire, but he did not care.

He had hurt him before. He could hurt him again.

Toothless roared, firing a shoot near his feet as a warning. If he had wanted to hit him, he would not have missed.

Toothless did not miss. Not ever.

He growled low in his throat as the man called Stoick launched himself toward them again, only to be stopped by the one with a hook for an arm.

"Are ye mad, Stoick? What makes ye think running full speed at a pissed off Night Fury is gonna get ye any closer to Hiccup?"

"What do you expect me to do, Gobber, watch my boy bleed to death? Can't you see his shoulder?"

The human men kept arguing, but Toothless did not care what they had to say. Especially when his boy stirred in his arms, a low moan escaping his lips.

Toothless nosed him with his snout, cooing in a way he hoped would sooth his rider. He watched as the boy blinked up at him, a weak smile tugging at his lips as he raises a shaking hand to brush his cheek.

Then he gazed at the scene happening behind them, turning his head so that he could see the men arguing. His face was pressed into Toothless' chest, his back facing them.

"D-Dad?" His human's voice trembled. It was so weak the others must barely have heard it, but they did, and Stoick broke free of the hook-man's grasp.

"Hiccup!" The man called Stoick screamed, and he looked a sight. Eyes wide, fists clenched, face wild with worry.

Toothless sniffed the air again. It still smelled of blood.

Blood and fear.

"You have to let them help me, bud. I can'tâ€¦g-get the arrow out by myself."

The Night Fury whined. Did the boy understand that he could die if they hurt him? They had done it before, they could do it again, and Toothless was tired of it. Toothless did not want people to hurt Hiccup. He readied a shot of plasma, opening his mouth as it built up in his throat.

"No. Toothless, no. I-I knowâ€¦bud. I know. But you have to trust me. P-Pleaseâ€¦I need their help. They won't hurt me. I promise."

More of the villagers were gathering now, and Toothless knew that some were angry. Some frightened. Some confused, and others so many mixtures of emotion, the Night Fury could not name them all. But he

could also see people with their hands on their weapons or over their mouths, and Toothless growled low in his throat, because they could try to kill him, but it would not happen. He would not fall to those axes.

He would not let them take Hiccup from him.

Hiccup was afraid now. Toothless could smell it on him, and he did not like that, not at all. So he whined a bit, troubled.

His human caresses his cheek again, and he felt the calm wash over him even before the boy spoke. "You have to listen to meâ€|b-bud. I know you're angry, and I know you're scared, but it's okay now. You kept me safe. It's okay."

Toothless nuzzled him and licked his face.

I did not keep you safe.

I let him hurt you.

I let them all hurt you.

How could Toothless let this happen again? How?

He whined again, and Hiccup sagged against his chest. "It's not your fault. I'd be dead if it weren't for you, Toothless. T-That'sâ€|all that matters nowâ€|" The human's speech was broken off by harsh coughing, followed by a groan.

Toothless once again looked at the arrow in Hiccup's shoulder. He could snap off the shaft himself, but he would never be able to take out the rest without another human's help.

Just then, he noticed another face he hadn't seen, her scent hidden among so many others in the crowd.

She was the human of Hiccup's heart.

Stormfly's rider. Astrid.

She approached him carefully, hand outstretched, face turned away, before coming to a stop just in front of them. There she remained motionless.

And Toothless knew she had also hurt Hiccup before. They all had. But it was also true she had not for many moons. And if she was putting her trust in him right nowâ€|did that not mean he could trust her with his rider too?

He roared in distress and hung his head. Had he no choice then?

The humans seemed to understand something had passed between dragon and rider, because Toothless looked up at them, wary, but no longer hostile. If he had to let someone fix Hiccup, it would be his sire, and Astrid. No one else.

Resigned, he pushed his snout into Astrid's hand, and when the human called Stoick approached them once again, he let him come.

End
file.